

# Parks System

The park system is a major investment for Eau Claire and a vital element of its quality of life. Eau Claire is proud of its long history of providing parks in every residential neighborhood, along with specialized athletic facilities that serve broader areas. And, because the City is blessed with both the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers, waterfront public access has been emphasized for a century. Now that those streams are used much less for industry than they were decades ago, parks and other public land uses have become more appropriate riverfront land uses.

This *Plan* is a minor mid-course correction and reaffirmation, since it continues a long program of planning, programming, and capital improvements. The *1993 Comprehensive Plan* recommended several locations for new parks and improvements to others. The *2003 to 2007 Five-Year Parks Plan* presented a detailed list of projects in priority to address deficiencies. This chapter will confirm a broad course of action and coordinate major park investments with other plan elements such as the Land Use Chapter.

Eau Claire faces challenges to the management of its park system on two fronts: first, to improve or maintain what it already has and, secondly, to provide new parks for future neighborhoods on the perimeter of the community. At the same time, the City wishes to extend its system of off-road paths and improve its stewardship of the natural resources that exist in parks and other public open spaces.

## Key Issues

1. **Full-service Playgrounds:** What should the City do to provide a community-wide system of full-service neighborhood playgrounds with full complements of facilities and programs?
2. **New Neighborhood Playgrounds:** What site design standards should the City set for playgrounds in new neighborhoods in order to find an appropriate balance between providing accessibility to playgrounds and limiting future service costs in maintaining playgrounds? What balance should the City seek between continuing the current policy of creating a 5- to 10-acre playground for each new neighborhood of 4,000 residents, or providing larger playgrounds to serve larger population service areas?
3. **Riverfront Parks:** What should the City do to ensure adequate public access to and along the Chippewa and Eau Claire riverfronts?

4. **The Role of Parks in Urban Design:** What should the City do to use parks, greenways and parkways to enhance residential neighborhoods and commercial districts, reflect local cultural heritage and honor civic life?
5. **Park Land Acquisition:** What should the City do to ensure adequate land acquisition for development of future parks?
6. **Ecological Stewardship:** What should the City do ensure that sufficient areas of the park system are managed for water quality improvements, wildlife habitat, protection of sensitive features, and natural interpretation?
7. **Swimming:** What should the City do to ensure that Eau Claire has an adequate community center open to the public, with an indoor swimming and water play center, meeting rooms, nature study facilities, gymnasiums and locker rooms?
8. **Classification System:** What should the City do to provide adequate park areas for community athletic fields?
9. **Greenways:** What should the City do to acquire adequate land to create linear parks and greenways along Otter, Lowes, and Sherman Creeks?
10. **Storm Water Detention:** What role should the storm water detention areas play in providing parks and open space sites in Eau Claire?



**Rest area along Chippewa River**

## Goal and Objectives

**Goal:** Expand the park system into new neighborhoods while improving the conditions in the older parks.

**Objective 1 – New Parks:** Plan, acquire, and develop additional parks to help meet the outdoor recreation needs of the community's population, protect environmentally sensitive areas, provide sites for environmental education and improve urban design.

**Objective 2 – Park Improvements and Maintenance:** Continue to improve existing parks and greenways so they meet current recreation needs, are visually appealing and sustain the natural environment.

**Objective 3 – Waterfront Access and Trails:** Improve public enjoyment of rivers and streams in Eau Claire by creating new park land, acquiring easements for access and protection of open space, and linking existing parks with paths where possible.

**Objective 4 – Bicycling and Walking:** Extend the off-road path system and supplement it with on-road bicycling lanes for transportation and recreation.

**Objective 5 – Role of Parks in Urban Design:** Locate and design parks, greenways and parkways to enhance the quality of residential neighborhoods and commercial districts, reflect Eau Claire's cultural heritage and honor civic life.

**Objective 6 – Ecology and Environment:** Plan and design parks and greenways to protect environmentally sensitive features, reduce negative environmental effects and serve as models of land stewardship.

**Objective 7 – City-wide Facilities and Recreation Programs:** Refine park system facilities and recreation programs to meet changing outdoor recreation needs, meet safety and access guidelines, and achieve other objectives of this *Plan*.

**Objective 8 – Other Community Recreational Facilities:** Work cooperatively with other communities, units of government, landowners, or recreation providers to reduce costs and enhance the delivery of outdoor recreational facilities.

## Parks System Policies

### Objective 1 – New Parks

**Plan, acquire, and develop additional parks to help meet the outdoor recreation needs of the community's population, protect environmentally sensitive areas, provide environmental education and improve urban design.**

Several new park sites are proposed in conjunction with the plan for future land use and the forecast growth of households and population.

**Policies:**

1. **Park Classifications:** Use the following park classifications when planning for and maintaining the City parks system:

- Play Lot
- Urban Park
- Neighborhood Playground
- Community Athletic Field
- Community Park
- Special Areas

The major characteristics of each type of park, including the primary group served, the service area, desirable size, ideal location, and typical facilities and features are list in Table 5-1, Standards for Park and Open Space Areas. The municipal park and open space standards contained within this *Plan* should be used as flexible guidelines to determine open space and facility needs.

The following classification and terminology changes are recommended:

- The **“Community Athletic Field”** classification will be created, and includes major softball, baseball, or soccer field complexes, which include much off-street parking and lighting. The Eau Claire Soccer Park would be moved from the special areas classification to the community athletic field classification.
- **“Special Areas”** would include all waterfront sites and linear parks along the rivers, along with scenic overlooks such as Mt. Tom Park or other unique facilities such as Archery Park.
- The **“Street Island”** classification remains, but no additional such parks are planned.
- Change the title of **“Neighborhood Park”** to **“Urban Park”** to eliminate confusion between neighborhood parks and neighborhood playgrounds.
- The recommended size for a new neighborhood playground will be 5 to 15 acres depending on land availability and planned facilities. Note that the classification “neighborhood playground” is the preferred terminology for this facility; however, the term “neighborhood park” can be used interchangeably.

2. **New Park Locations:** Acquire land for new parks in the approximate locations and sizes illustrated by Figure 5-1, *Parks System Plan*, and listed in Table 5-2. The means of acquisition will be according to Policy 3, below.

A number of new playgrounds and park sites are proposed in perimeter locations, plus linear parkland along the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers, and a linear park (for a path) along a power line easement. These sites should be developed consistent with the recommendations shown in Table 5-3.

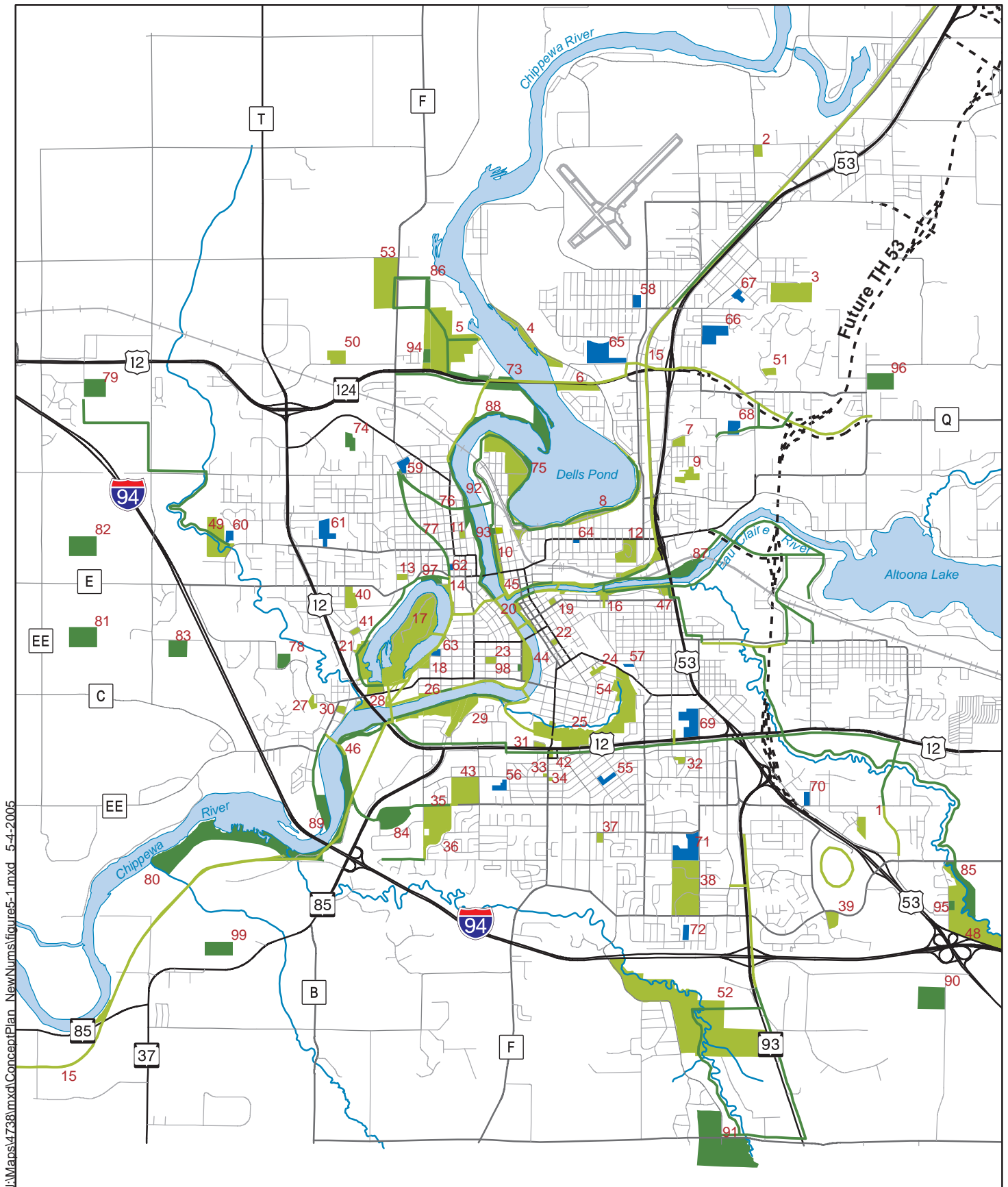
The locations, sizes and configurations shown by Figure 5-1 are approximate and will be adjusted during the acquisition process. City staff will negotiate with landowners and developers to specify the location and configuration of each park with the aim of acquiring the approximate amount of land indicated by Table 5-3 and satisfying the

**Table 5-1**  
**Standards for Park and Open Space Areas**

	<b>Play Lot</b>	<b>Neighborhood Playground/ Park</b>	<b>Urban Park</b>	<b>Community Park</b>
<b>Group Served</b>	Pre-school children (5 yrs. & under)	Neighborhood surrounding playground (primarily those 5-14 yrs in age)	Neighborhood surrounding park (for all ages)	Entire community (for all ages)
<b>Service Area</b>	1 to 4 blocks on single project	½ mile radius from playgrounds	½ mile radius	Area within 20 min. travel time
<b>Desirable Size</b>	No standard	5-15 acres min.	2 acre min.	100+ acres desirable
<b>Location</b>	High density neighborhood which lack private yards. Interior or residential block or housing development or in corner of neighborhood park.	Near center of neighborhood. Preferably at or adjoining elementary school. Should be accessible by pedestrians.	Near intensely developed areas & areas of high density	Where appropriate sites can be obtained incorporating scenic or other natural features. Should be along collector or arterial streets.
<b>Facilities &amp; Features</b>	Sandbox, swings, slides, climbing structures, spray pool, benches, open shelter, fences, paved & grass areas. Not considered essential in large-lot residential areas.	Play apparatus area, multi-purpose athletic field, shelter building, skating rinks, organized summer playground program offered. Quiet or passive areas and activities should also be provided. Off-street parking desirable.	Shaded areas for quiet activities, plantings, benches, picnic tables, foundations, etc.	Active athletic areas similar to playfield but at least ½ should be rustic & provide picnicking, hiking, fishing, boating, etc. Off-street parking required. Shelters, swimming pools & quiet passive areas desirable.

**Table 5-1 (cont'd)**  
**Standards for Park and Open Space Areas**

	<b>Special Area Facilities</b>	<b>Community Athletic Fields</b>	<b>Street Island</b>
<b>Group Served</b>	Entire community	Entire community	Neighborhood surrounding site (for all ages)
<b>Service Area</b>	No specific service area	No specific service area	Immediately adjacent site
<b>Desirable Size</b>	Depends on type of facility	Depends on type of fields provided	6,500 sq. ft.
<b>Location</b>	Depends on type of facility	Site with good roadway access	Depends on purpose & design
<b>Facilities &amp; Features</b>	Hockey rinks, swimming facilities, archery, skiing, sledding, pedestrian/bicycle trails, scenic overlooks or sites, waterfront sites, linear parks.	Major complexes for such sports as: soccer, softball, baseball, etc.	Benches, plantings.



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- Planned Parks/Playgrounds
- Existing Parks/Playgrounds
- School Playground and School Open Space Sites
- Planned Trail
- Existing Trail

Figure 5-1

**Table 5-2: Eau Claire Park Sites**

<b>Existing Facilities</b>		57	Flynn School Playground
1	Horlacher Ballfields	58	Davey Elementary School Playground
2	Sundet Playground	59	Roosevelt Elementary School Playground
3	Pinehurst Playground & Recreation Area	61	DeLong Middle School
4	Riverview Park	62	Lincoln Elementary School
5	Northwest Community Park	63	Lakeshore Elementary School
6	Hy Lyne Open Space	64	Longfellow Elementary School
7	Zephyr Hill Playground	65	North High School Fields
8	McDonough Playground	66	Northstar Middle School
9	Shale Pit Open Space	67	Locust Lane Elementary School
10	Forest Street Park	68	Northwoods Elementary School Playground
11	Kessler Playground	69	Memorial High School Fields
12	Mount Tom Park	70	Robbins Elementary School
13	Cameron Playground	71	South Middle School
14	Half Moon Beach	72	Meadowview Elementary School Playground
15	Chippewa River State Trail	<b>Future Facilities</b>	
16	Boyd Playground	32	Future Taft-Kay Playground
17	Carson Park	60	Future Sherman Creek Playground
18	Lakeshore Playground	73	Future North Crossing Trail Segment
19	University Park	74	Future County Farm Playground
20	Haymarket Open Space	75	Addition to Mount Simon Park
21	Rod and Gun Park	76	Railroad to Trail Conversion
22	Wilson Park	77	Future Trail
23	Randall Park	78	Future Menomonie Street Playground
24	Demmler Playground	79	Future Playground at Renee Drive
25	Putnam Park	80	Future Lower Chippewa River County Park
26	Hobbs Arena/Boat Landing	81	Future Playground south of County Road E
27	Mount Washington Ski Jump Facility	82	Future Playground north of County Road E
28	Veterans Park	83	Future Playground east of County Road TT
29	UW Arboretum	84	Sky Park Area Future Open Space
30	Newell Playground	85	Addition to Southeast Community Park
31	Wold Court	86	Trail between Northwest and Jeffers Road Fields
33	State Street Park - NW	87	Future Eau Claire River Trail
34	State Street Park - SE	88	Future Chippewa River Trail at Xcel Substation
35	Eau Claire Soccer Park	89	Ferry Street Open Space
36	Grover Heights Playground	90	Future Playground at Graff Road
37	Mitscher Playground	91	Future Community Park at County Road II
38	Fairfax Park	92	Future Old Wells Road (First Street) Trail
39	Oakwood Hills Playground	93	Future North River Fronts Playground
40	Buffington Playground	94	Future Playground site within Northwest Community Park
41	Buffington Drive Open Space	95	Future Playground site within Southeast Community Park
42	Jaycette Park	96	Future East Side Playground site
43	UW-EC Bollinger Fields	97	Future expansion to Half Moon Beach/ Bayview Park and trail along the west side of lake
44	Owen Park	98	Future First Avenue Open Space
45	Phoenix Park	99	Little Red Elementary School
46	Chippewa River State Trail Realignment		
47	Archery Park		
48	Southeast Community Park		
49	Sherman Creek Park (Town of Union)		
50	Prairie Lane Soccer Fields		
51	Princeton Valley Playground		
52	Lowes Creek County Park		
53	Jeffers Road Fields		
54	Kappus Park		
<b>School Play Fields &amp; Playgrounds</b>			
55	Manz Elementary School Playground		
56	Putnam Heights School Playground		



**Table 5-3  
Development Program for the Planned Parks**

<b>Park Number or Location</b>	<b>Classification</b>	<b>Approximate Acres</b>	<b>Recommended Components</b>
<b>Northwestern Locations</b>			
# 79 South of US 124 between CTH EE and TT	Neighborhood Playground	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multi-purpose open play area</li> <li>• Children's play equipment</li> <li>• Basketball court</li> <li>• Picnic shelter</li> </ul>
# 82 West of I-94 between CTH EE and E; adjacent to a potential elementary school site	Neighborhood Playground	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multi-purpose open play area</li> <li>• Children's play equipment</li> <li>• Basketball court</li> <li>• Picnic shelter</li> </ul>
# 81 South of CTH E between CTH EE and TT	Neighborhood Playground	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multi-purpose open play area</li> <li>• Children's play equipment</li> <li>• Basketball court</li> <li>• Picnic shelter</li> </ul>
# 83 Between I-94 and CTH TT south of CTH E	Neighborhood Playground	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multi-purpose open play area</li> <li>• Children's play equipment</li> <li>• Basketball court</li> <li>• Picnic shelter</li> </ul>
# 60 Adjacent to Sherman Creek Park and School	School-Park Playground	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Soccer field</li> <li>• Multi-use play field</li> <li>• Play equipment</li> </ul>
# 78 Menomonie Street	Neighborhood Playground	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Play equipment</li> <li>• Flower garden</li> <li>• Off-street parking</li> <li>• Creek overlook and paths</li> <li>• Basketball court</li> <li>• Picnic shelter</li> </ul>
<b>Northeastern Locations</b>			
# 96 North of County Q	Neighborhood Playground	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multi-purpose open play area</li> <li>• Children's play equipment</li> <li>• Basketball court</li> <li>• Picnic shelter</li> </ul>

Southeastern Locations			
# 90 Adjacent to Graff Road (CTH 1A) and potential elementary school	School Park Playground	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multi-purpose open play area</li> <li>• Children's play equipment</li> <li>• Basketball court</li> <li>• Picnic shelter</li> </ul>
# 91 At the intersection of Lowes Creek Road and CTH II	Community Park	115	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multi-purpose open play area</li> <li>• Children's play equipment</li> <li>• Basketball court</li> <li>• Picnic shelter</li> <li>• Trails</li> </ul>
Southwestern Locations			
# 80 Lower Chippewa River County Park	County Park	114	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• River access</li> <li>• Fishing</li> <li>• Trails – snowmobile, Nordic skiing, hiking</li> <li>• Nature Interpretation</li> </ul>

area needed to accommodate the planned facilities. Street access, the length of public street abutting each park and the relationship to adjacent buildings will also be negotiated in that process.

- 3. Acquisition and Improvement of Neighborhood Playgrounds:** Consider the adoption of a City ordinance requiring that some combination of land and/or cash be dedicated by anyone subdividing property, with such land or money being applied to parkland acquisition and/or park improvements. Thus, land for future parks would be acquired during the platting process. Cash given during subdivision should be earmarked for land acquisition or improvements in or near the area from which it came.

If the land dedication process is not sufficient to acquire sites of sufficient size and quality as recommended by this *Plan*, then the City will use general funds to acquire additional property. The donation of lands for park needs should also be encouraged.

Eau Claire will attempt to acquire land for new neighborhood playgrounds before the vicinity is platted if possible. This may be done by identifying specific sites and acquiring land using general funds or bond proceeds. Alternatively, such lands should be acquired during the platting process using the proposed new parkland or cash dedication ordinance. In either case, it will be important to determine the approximate location, size and facilities desired for each park so that the City can act decisively and wisely when an opportunity presents itself.

It is judged appropriate to require land developers to dedicate land or money during the platting process because those resources will go to create neighborhood playgrounds that will benefit the residents who ultimately bear those costs. This is considered more equitable than requiring people all across the City to pay for a new neighborhood park that might not benefit them. On the other hand, the large

community athletic fields and special use parks, which do have City-wide benefit, ought to be financed through the general fund.

4. **Components of Future Neighborhood Playgrounds:** Design and build new playgrounds with these basic components:
  - Multi-purpose open play area
  - Children's play equipment
  - Basketball court
  - Picnic shelter

Additional elements may be added at later times depending on identified neighborhood or wider district needs, and the availability of funding.

Summer playground programs and ice-skating rinks will not be provided at every playground site. Instead, they will be provided at sites having a larger service area than the playgrounds.

5. **Riverfront Parks:** Continue to extend public parks, plazas, walkways, and overlooks along the Chippewa River and along the Eau Claire River from the confluence to Altoona or the future Birch Street bridge. In some locations, existing development may make this impossible in the foreseeable future, but redeveloped sites should include some public access along the waterfront. (Refer also to Objective 3, Waterfront Access and Trails.)
6. **Coordination with Other Organizations:** Coordinate with the Eau Claire Area School District in the placement and development of neighborhood playgrounds in conjunction with elementary schools. In addition, emphasis should be placed on coordinating with the towns, villages, Altoona and counties in the development and maintenance of regional parks and open space facilities.
7. **Neighborhood Playground Location and Design:** Locate neighborhood playgrounds not associated with a school near the middle of a defined residential service area rather than near its edge along an arterial road.
8. **Search Areas for Sports Complex:** Pursue the acquisition and development of additional areas for soccer facilities in the northeast or northwest portions of the City. These facilities may be in one or more locations. The site(s) should be identified by 2008 and the land acquired by 2010. (See Objective 7, City-wide Facilities and Recreation Programs, Policy 1.)
9. **Community Park Master Plans:** Develop master plans for the Northwest Community Park and Southeast Community Park sites.
10. **Recognize Diverse Needs:** Seek to recognize and accommodate the diverse recreational needs of the community:

- Neighborhood level recreation facilities should be made available to each household in the City at either a neighborhood playground facility or through the joint use of school facilities.
- Facilities provided at sites classified as neighborhood parks should reflect the needs of the particular neighborhood or user group within the service area.
- Park and open space facilities should be designed to serve all ages and the disabled.

- 11. Coordinating Locations for New Park Sites:** Coordinate the siting of new park areas with the City's long-range development plan for major storm water drainage detention and retention facilities and school sites. Some economies in land acquisition, grading, and site development may be gained by siting these facilities together on one large tract of land rather than on smaller individual parcels. It is important that the amount of land needed for a particular park site is not sacrificed in combining such multi-use areas.

## **Objective 2 – Park Improvements and Maintenance**

**Continue to improve existing parks and greenways so they meet current recreation needs, are visually appealing, and sustain the natural environment.**

Many recent improvements have been made to Eau Claire's parks and recreational facilities; however, some deficiencies still exist. The challenge will be to sustain an adequate renewal effort during periods of budgetary retrenchment.

### **Policies:**

- 1. Five-year Improvements Plan:** Continue the process of preparing and updating the City's five-year parks plans, such as the recent 2003 to 2007 plan. That plan lists very specific actions to improve individual parks, and ranks them in priority and by year, and indicates the possible funding source. Included with each five-year plan are an updated list, map, and description of the parks in the system. Each five-year plan is drafted by the City staff and reviewed and adjusted by the Waterways and Parks Commission.

The criteria used to identify and rank priority improvement projects are:

- *Coordination:* Does the improvement coordinate well with other work currently committed for or recently accomplished at that park?
- *Physical Need:* What is the physical condition of the facility relative to other needs in the system? Is there a safety hazard?
- *Service Deficiencies:* How seriously deficient is the park system relative to that type of facility?
- *Neighborhood or District Planning:* How well would the improvement add to an overall improvement campaign in that neighborhood or district? Is it supported by a neighborhood plan?
- *Geographic Balance:* Would the improvement help to balance parks spending across the City in that year?

- *Funding Source:* Are special sources of funding available for certain areas of the City or for certain projects (e.g., Federal Community Development Block Grant funds in neighborhoods with low- and moderate-household incomes, lake improvement funds from the DNR)?

2. **Cooperative Efforts.** Investigate opportunities to coordinate park improvements and maintenance with the Eau Claire Area School District, counties and towns.



Picnic shelter at Carson Park

### Objective 3 – Waterfront Access and Trails

**Improve public enjoyment of rivers and streams in Eau Claire by creating new parkland, acquiring easements for access and protection of open space, and linking existing parks with paths where possible.**

Eau Claire has 32 miles of waterfront, including the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers, and Half Moon Lake. For quality of life, economic development, sustainable property values, and environmental protection, the community owes it to itself to line these water bodies with continuous public open space.

The Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers, Half Moon Lake, and numerous creeks, such as Otter, Sherman, and Lowes Creeks are integral components of the form and image of Eau Claire and help provide an abundance of open space and recreation within the City. In addition, the natural beauty of the community's scenic vistas, hills, and valleys are in large part due to these waterways. Because of the importance of these resources, the ultimate goal of the City should be to protect these resources and provide public access to and along these waterfront areas for the enjoyment and recreation of the citizens of Eau Claire.

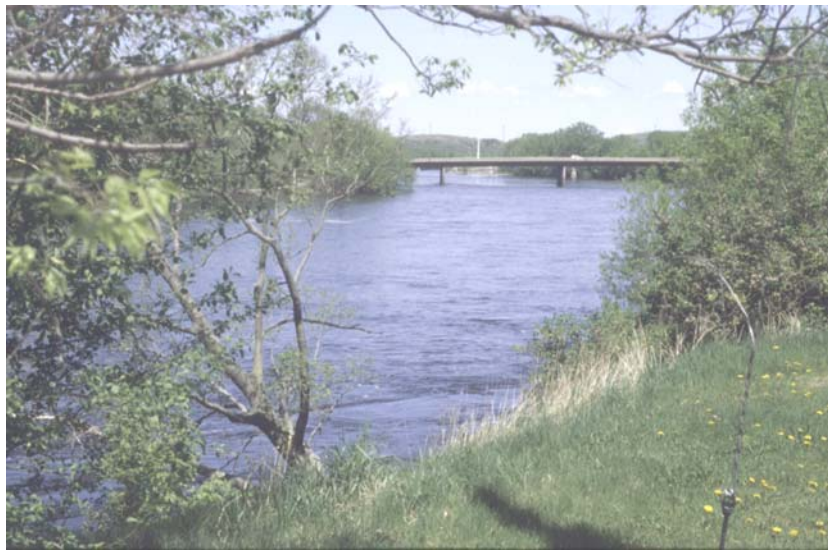
#### **Policies:**

1. **Waterfront Linear Parks:** Seek to acquire land in the form of continuous linear open space corridors called greenways along the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers, Dells Pond, Half Moon Lake, Otter Creek, and portions of Sherman Creek. The Otter Creek corridor between the Eau Claire River and Southeast Community Park has particular promise, and that effort should be coordinated with the City of Altoona.

2. **Half Moon Lake:** Continue to acquire properties around Half Moon Lake as they become available until all lakefront property is publicly owned.
3. **Priority Locations:** Seek to negotiate the acquisition of land (or at least a pedestrian easement) along sites where riverfront development is about to occur.
4. **Walking and Bicycling:** Build paths for walking and bicycling in the riverfront greenways where conditions permit. Care should be taken to protect the ecological integrity of the flood plains, wetlands, and bluffs. In some locations, benches, overlooks, and occasional larger park nodes will be included. Waterfront bicycling paths will be linked to the City-wide network of paths via other paths or on-street striped bicycling lanes.

The City will monitor use of the trails and, where pedestrian and bicyclist conflicts occur because of traffic levels or design, bicycle traffic may be separated from pedestrian traffic.

5. **Waterway Plan:** Update the City's Waterway Plan, which was prepared in 1988. This update should emphasize the City's commitment to protect the City's waterway resources, to provide public access to and along waterfront areas for the enjoyment and recreation of the citizens of Eau Claire, and to encourage only that development that enhances the attractiveness of the waterways and is sensitive to waterways environmental issues.



The Chippewa River

#### **Objective 4 – Bicycling and Walking**

**Extend the off-road path system and supplement it with on-road bicycling lanes for transportation and recreation.**

This chapter focuses on the off-road system of paths and trails that primarily extend through the City's greenways, riverfront areas and parks. However, another important component of the overall bicycle transportation system for the City are pathways that extend along arterial streets and on the on-street striped bicycle lanes, which are addressed in more detail in the Transportation Chapter. Although bicycle paths along streets or on-street striped bicycle lanes are not traditionally considered to be part of a City's park system, they do provide a form of outdoor recreation and provide a means to access many of the park facilities. It is important to recognize that in developing a city-wide transportation network for bicycles in the Eau Claire area, both components must be considered in planning the overall system.

**Policies:**

1. **Park Access:** Improve access to the parks and waterfront greenways by linking them with off-road paths and on-street striped bicycling lanes.
2. **Trails Network:** Expand the system of off-road bicycling paths as shown by Figure 5-2, Trails. These routes may either be along former railroad rights-of-way, greenways, or within road rights-of-way or incorporated into future subdivisions through purchase or developer dedication. If along roads, the paths may be physically separate from the road, or wide shoulders, or striped on-road lanes may be used. The City will identify and complete missing links in the trail system, such as near the 600 block of Menomonie Street and along First Avenue, north of Lake Street.
3. **Integrated Bicycle Route System:** Integrate off-road pathways and trails with on-road bicycle facilities to create a city-wide bicycle route system for bicycle transportation. (See also Objective 10, Bicycle Network, in the Transportation Chapter.)



**Trail through Owen Park**





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- Bridge / Underpass
- Proposed Bridge / Underpass
- Existing Multiple-Use Path
- - - Proposed Multiple-Use Path

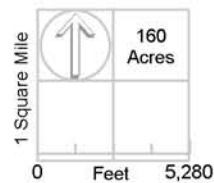


Figure 5-2

**Trails Plan**





First Avenue Trail

### **Objective 5 – Role of Parks in Urban Design**

**Locate and design parks, greenways, and parkways to enhance the quality of residential neighborhoods and commercial districts, reflect Eau Claire’s cultural heritage, and honor civic life.**

Parks are a major and highly visible public investment that can have a significant positive effect on the appearance of a community and its quality of life. Eau Claire has several fine examples of how parks and greenways can be used to improve or sustain nearby private investment. This section of the Parks System Chapter recommends ways that existing or future parks should be used to help create better neighborhoods, promote revitalization, and build an attractive and very urban community.

#### **Policies:**

- 1. A Network of Green Spaces:** Continue to build a system of green open spaces for recreation, urban beauty and natural protection that are linked by linear parks (greenways), off-road paths and on-street bicycle lanes, and generously landscaped roads known as parkways.
- 2. A System of Civic Spaces:** Incorporate the design of the City park and greenway system as one element of a larger system of civic spaces. Through a high quality of design and stewardship, key civic spaces will sustain the quality of life, private investment and economic competitiveness of Eau Claire. The system elements should be designed to complement one another both visually and functionally, and should be interconnected for motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians. Other elements of this system include:

- Parks of all types
- Plazas
- Schools
- Civic buildings, such as City Hall and the library
- The university and technical college campuses
- Local residential streets, sidewalks, and street trees
- Minor arterial or collector roads
- Bridges
- Off-street and on-street bicycle lanes
- Wetlands and ponds
- Rivers and streams
- Wooded areas



**Secluded path in Putnam Park under State Street**

3. **Neighborhood Quality:** Seek to design parks, greenways, and parkways as visual assets that should enhance the level of private investment in nearby housing and create lasting value in neighborhoods. Each park should:
- Be open to the neighborhood on at least half of its perimeter;
  - Include generous landscaping to soften and direct views;
  - Provide both active spaces and quiet, natural areas;
  - Use civic buildings, such as a gazebo or picnic shelter as a focal point;
  - Be designed in school-park situations in coordination with the facilities provided by the school;
  - Include off-street parking designed in careful relation to the topography, plantings, and views so as to minimize its visual effect. No more off-street parking should be provided than is reasonable in addition to on-street parking.

At the same time, the City should strive to ensure that development that occurs next to parks is compatible with these open space areas.

4. **Waterfront Public Open Space:** Provide well-designed and accessible public corridors along rivers and streams for public open space and parks. The City should design the green space to include walkways and bicycling paths, protect key environmental features such as wetlands or flood plains, use environmentally sensitive bank stabilization techniques instead of heavily engineered devices, and create visual and functional linkages between the waterfronts and nearby neighborhoods or districts. In addition, a large portion of the edge of public linear open space should abut local streets rather than private lots in order to extend the benefits of that open space into the larger neighborhood.
5. **Quiet Spaces:** Include quiet spaces in parks and playgrounds for strolling or sitting wherever the landscape allows. Some locations in the park system should be managed to retain their wooded or otherwise natural characteristics to invite

exploration and discovery. Such places offer a small refuge from the bustle of the urban environment and offer opportunities to connect with nature on a daily basis.

6. **Civic Pride and Local Heritage:** Design and maintain parks and other public spaces as the highest expression of civic pride and local heritage. Parks should be beautiful as well as functional so that current generations will enjoy their use and future generations will appreciate what they represent. Parks and greenways should be inspiring and represent the best of Eau Claire.

7. **Park Buildings:** Design buildings and facilities in parks to follow a consistent architectural theme reflecting local materials, building practices, cultural heritage, and user needs. Buildings should be classic in proportions and materials, adaptable, and long lasting. If necessary, it is preferable to delay construction rather than to install a structure that is not of sufficient quality.



Fairfax Park Swimming Pool

8. **Associated Furnishings:** Select associated park furnishings, such as benches, bicycle parking, fences, signs, or trash containers to complement the design of the major buildings and require relatively low levels of maintenance.
9. **Development of Adjacent Park and Greenway Areas:** Ensure that development that occurs adjacent to parks and greenways is compatible with such areas, provides appropriate screening, maintains access, and does not negatively affect the natural environment of such park or greenway.

The Waterways and Parks Commission currently reviews development proposals that abut a park or open space. The City should consider expanding the Commission's review to include not only development proposals that abut park sites, but also those development proposals that are adjacent to parks or greenways and only separated by a public right-of-way.

## Objective 6 – Ecology and Environment

**Plan and design parks and greenways to protect environmentally sensitive features, reduce negative environmental effects, and serve as models of land stewardship.**

Parks can and should provide benefits in addition to outdoor recreation, such as protecting environmentally sensitive areas and connecting people to nature on a daily basis. This section describes several ways that the City will manage its parks and greenways in an ecologically responsible manner while meeting other objectives.

**Policies:**

1. **Natural Preservation and Stewardship:** Identify, preserve and enhance existing valuable natural areas, such as wetlands, major wooded areas, hilltops, and native prairies (if any) and provide for appropriate public use. Identify such lands prior to the neighborhood development process. The City should also establish an inventory of other significant natural resource areas, such as Mt. Tom.
2. **Half Moon Lake Watershed:** Continue to work with the DNR and citizen groups on water quality programs for Half Moon Lake and its watershed area. In addition, promote wildlife and fisheries management programs for the Half Moon Lake, Rod and Gun Park, and Carson Park areas. Encourage such programs in other appropriate areas within the City.
3. **Otter Creek:** Seek to acquire a strip of land on the east side of Otter Creek opposite the Southeast Community Park to protect that wooded valley beyond the already-protected flood plain. This greenway should be sufficiently wide to buffer the effects of future urban development to the east.

Eau Claire will partner with the City of Altoona to acquire land along one or both sides of Otter Creek between the Eau Claire River and County Trunk Highway AA for use as a greenway. Because some areas along Otter Creek are already divided into small parcels for housing, the cities will have to act soon to acquire meaningful amounts of creek edge.

4. **Manage Drainageways Naturally:** Seek to identify and maintain drainageways in parks in a natural state. Drainage swales and creeks are important for their ability to provide wildlife habitat and movement paths, cost-effectively manage storm water, reduce flooding, and serve as visual amenities. Mowing should be discouraged, and environmentally sensitive methods of bank protection should be used rather than engineering approaches.

The City will also try to incorporate neighborhood detention ponds into parks for the sake of park aesthetics, water quality, and land efficiency. This should be done without losing the amount of land needed for active park uses, however.

5. **Use Sustainable Plantings:** Seek to reduce the amount of park area devoted to mowed turf and introduce in its place plant species that require less maintenance, provide habitat for birds, small animals and insects, and that improve the quality of water runoff. Invasive, non-native plant species should be controlled.
6. **Link Open Spaces:** Link major intact natural areas in public open spaces by corridors of native woods and grasses for the sake of wildlife habitat and movement, and urban aesthetics. Landscape elements that can be used for such links include streams and stream edges, fencerows and hedgerows, drainage swales, roadside ditches with natural vegetation, flood plains, and wetlands.
7. **Retain Unmanaged Places:** Retain selected few wooded and other natural areas in the park system at a very low level of management, in order to provide places for people to explore on their own and experience a rudimentary bit of wilderness.

8. **Stewardship Example:** Seek to set a positive example of land stewardship. As the major public landowner within the community, the City should set a good example of land stewardship for the private sector to emulate by following sound principles of sustainable design.
9. **Provide Educational Opportunities:** Educate the general public and teach park users about the physical and natural environments existing within the City's parks through the use of interpretive displays, plaques, educational programs, etc. Such efforts should address topics such as vegetation, wildlife, aquatics, and geology, as well as highlight significant historical events associated with a particular park.
10. **Work with Other Organizations:** Cooperate with allied organizations (e.g., the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, DNR, Friends of Half Moon Lake, Eau Claire County) that are dedicated to protecting the local natural environment in order to leverage spending and volunteer help, marshal political support, and evaluate resources.

## **Objective 7 – City-wide Facilities and Recreation Programs**

**Refine park system facilities and recreation programs to meet changing outdoor recreation needs, meet safety and access guidelines, and achieve other objectives of this *Plan*.**

Eau Claire supports similar programs in many locations, so these activities are best addressed on a City-wide basis. The following policies provide recommendations that apply across the community.

### **Policies:**

1. **Soccer Fields:** Seek to identify and acquire land in the northern half of the community for a second soccer complex. Additional adult softball fields might also be located there. The City should seek to identify a site by 2008, acquire the land by 2010, and substantially complete construction by 2015 to 2020. Currently, most of the City's soccer fields are located at Eau Claire Soccer Park, which is along Hamilton Avenue, in the southwestern quadrant of the City. This 38-acre site is fully developed with nine irrigated fields (five full-sized and four youth-sized). Some of the smaller fields overlap with the larger fields.

At the Soccer Park, there are not enough fields for all the age groups in the annual tournament sponsored by the Chippewa Valley Soccer League, so fields belonging to the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire at nearby Bollinger Field are also used. No artificial lighting is provided for these fields, which limits the



**Eau Claire Soccer Park**

number of games that can be played, especially in the spring and fall. Another deficiency is that this complex is not easily accessible from the northern and northeastern parts of the community.

The future northern site should be sized to accommodate eight to ten soccer fields (approximately 25 to 30 acres) including parking, concessions, and storage. On-site ponding would increase the needed acreage.

The site(s) should be generally flat and accessible from a major collector or minor arterial road. Since there will be lighting, traffic, and parking, the relationship of the site and its layout to housing should be considered.

The search should be conducted generally in the northern half of the community, either northwest or northeast, to provide geographic balance with the Hamilton Avenue soccer complex.

2. **Adult Softball Fields:** Seek to develop additional adult softball fields. Softball fields are presently located only at Carson Park and the University's Bollinger Fields. The outfield dimensions of the fields at Bollinger Fields are considered inadequate by some players using the most dynamic bats and balls. The City should pursue the development of four to six adult softball fields with adequately sized fields on the City-owned land on the west side of Jeffers Road and south of County Line Road.
3. **Youth Softball Fields:** Seek to develop additional youth softball fields. Youth softball in Eau Claire is limited to a girls' fast-pitch league, as a complement to the predominately boys' Little League. The number of fields for youth softball appears adequate and their dimensions are sufficient for current demand. If the adult softball fields were moved from Hobbs Field to a new softball complex, this would address any youth field needs anticipated in the next five to ten years.
4. **Baseball:** Maintain adequate baseball fields to meet community needs. Baseball in Eau Claire is played in several age levels. Eau Claire Little League consists of National League and American League associations, which play on privately maintained fields at Fairfax Park, DeLong Middle School, and North High School, and the Lowes Creek Little League, which plays at Horlacher Park in the Town of Washington. At this time, there is no need for additional Little League fields.

The Babe Ruth League uses the Mount Simon Fields and at times the Carson Park stadium, which is adequate for their needs. The question has been raised as to whether the Carson Park ball field should eventually be changed to artificial turf.

The American Legion teams play at the Carson Park Baseball Stadium, Fairfax Field and Bollinger Field.

5. **Football:** Maintain the Carson Park football field to meet community needs. The Carson Park Field has been upgraded to artificial turf using donations from the private sector, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, the high schools, and with income from the sale of beverage franchise rights at the field. The artificial turf will allow the field to be used more intensively without degradation. It is expected that the savings in maintenance, along with increased income from greater use, will



cover the cost of the artificial turf over the life of the turf (10 to 15 years). It will also provide a consistently better and safer playing surface.

6. **Basketball:** Seek to provide outdoor basketball courts at each neighborhood playground.
7. **Disc Golf:** Assess and address community needs for additional disc golf courses. A site study should be conducted. City and County parks should be considered in this analysis.
8. **Tennis:** Continue to monitor the needs for additional community tennis courts. It does not appear that there is a need for more tennis courts presently or in the foreseeable future.
9. **Skate Parks:** Continue to monitor the needs for additional community skate park facilities. The YMCA operates a skate park near its tennis facility along Hastings Way, but a “Y” membership is required to use it. There is no additional demand for another skate park at this time.
10. **Swimming:** Continue to monitor the need for additional or improved outdoor swimming facilities. The outdoor swimming pool and water slides at Fairfax Park are adequate for the City’s summer needs within the time frame of this *Plan*, although they should be supplemented by spray equipment.



Swimming beach on Half Moon Lake

There is also a non-supervised swimming beach at the northeast end of Half Moon Lake.

11. **Boat Launches:** Assess and address community needs for boat launches. The City maintains boat landings at Riverview Park and Mt. Simon Park for access to the Chippewa River and Dells Pond, at Carson Park for access to Half Moon Lake, and behind Hobbs Ice Center for access to the Chippewa River. The Riverview Park boat launch is near capacity on summer weekends. All boat landings are free and open to the public. Trailer parking is available at all sites. No internal combustion engines are allowed on Half Moon Lake.

The feasibility of creating a launch should be studied at the Xcel Energy property off Old Wells Road (accessible from the western side of the community). The City should conduct a study of the number of boats that typically use Dells Pond and the upper Chippewa River to determine the boating capacity of this portion of the river, as well as whether any of the semi-submerged logging “booms” should be removed.

An additional boat launch is proposed at the proposed county park on the Chippewa River downstream of I-94 in the Town of Brunswick and on the east side of Half Moon Lake.

12. **Canoe Launches:** Assess and address community needs for canoe launches. Currently, canoes may be put into the Chippewa River from any of the motorboat launches. The City should consider providing additional canoe launches at:
- Phoenix Park at the confluence of the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers
  - North side of the Eau Claire River and west of the Birch Street crossing of the river
  - Near the Lake Altoona dam (possibly by the City of Altoona)
  - West of the City Shops located on Forest Street
13. **Fishing Docks:** Assess and address the community needs for additional fishing docks. The City should consider installing additional fishing docks on Half Moon Lake near the causeway and Lakeshore School, on Dells Pond at Mount Simon Park, and on the Chippewa River at Riverview Park, north of the existing boat launch.
14. **Nordic Ski Trails:** Assess and address the community needs for additional Nordic ski trails. There are City cross-country skiing trails in three locations: City Wells Area (flat trail, approximately 3 miles), Carson Park (rolling terrain with 1 hill, approximately 1 mile) and Fairfax Park (fairly flat trail, approximately 1.7 miles). There may be a possibility of an additional trail, although flat, in the proposed county park on the lower Chippewa River downstream of I-94.

More extensive Nordic skiing trails are located in four of the Eau Claire County Parks, particularly Tower Ridge Recreation Area, located in the Town of Seymour.

15. **Community Center:** Continue to investigate the need for and feasibility of building a “community recreation center.” This facility could include features such as basketball courts, volleyball courts, weight lifting room, community meeting rooms, nature study, and Parks and Recreation Department offices. Optional elements would be a third ice sheet and an “aquatic center.” Development of a conceptual design was identified in the 2003 to 2007 Parks Capital Improvements program.

The present “community center” located at First and Oxford Avenues is an old school building that is functionally obsolescent. A new facility would alleviate this problem and allow the City to reduce its costs for renting school facilities to provide City recreational programs.

The City already owns a very appropriate 9.6 acre site for this potential facility along Menomonie Street at the southern entrance to Carson Park. That location, adjacent to Half Moon Lake and walking trails, would provide opportunities for nature study. Funding assistance for the ice arena could potentially come from groups such as the Eau Claire Hockey Association and the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.



Two of the major questions concerning a community center will be whether private organizations such as the YMCA and the Eau Claire Indoor Sports Center are adequately meeting these needs, and whether the community is comfortable with the prices charged by the private providers. The YMCA began raising funds in 2004 to expand its facilities at either its Downtown location or a site on the periphery of the City.

16. **Artificial Turf Fields:** Investigate the increased use of the new, long-blade artificial turf on select, premier fields for soccer, football, baseball, and softball.

The cost of artificial turf is decreasing, in some cases making it more affordable and efficient than natural grass. Schools and park systems are beginning to find this to be a cost-effective investment over the long-term for certain fields because of decreased maintenance and increased use. If the City can find other organizations with which to share in the cost, and, perhaps, increased sources of revenue, then the decision to change surfaces could be made on a case-by-case basis.

17. **Dog Park:** Assess and address the community needs for an additional dog park. A place for letting dogs run off-leash with other canines has been created in Southeast Community Park. The need for a second site on the north side of the City should be considered.

18. **Chippewa River Trail:** Pursue completion of the remaining sections of the Chippewa River Trail in Eau Claire. These sections include:

- Between 6th and 7th Avenue in the Historic Randall Park Neighborhood
- Between N. Dewey and N. Barstow Streets
- East of N. Dewey Street to Putnam Street
- From the site of the new Boyd Park pedestrian bridge east to the existing trail at Moore Street
- From Eddy Lane, north to the City limits



Eau Claire Dog Park

19. **Public Opinion Survey:** Conduct periodic community citizen surveys to assess public opinion about the adequacy of the various park facilities and programs.
20. **Summer Playground Program:** Work to continue to provide the City-sponsored summer playground program. Since, this program is not offered within each neighborhood or at each neighborhood playground, the City should regularly assess neighborhood needs and demand for this program in order to direct program offerings to the areas experiencing the greatest need. However, in selecting summer playground sites, the City must also consider site location on a City-wide basis in order to afford all interested youth the opportunity to participate in the program. In

addition, work to identify and secure funding sources to assist in providing this program at the neighborhood playgrounds

## **Objective 8 – Other Community Recreational Facilities**

**Work cooperatively with other communities, units of government, landowners, or recreation providers to reduce costs and enhance the delivery of outdoor recreational facilities.**

### **Policies:**

- 1. Cooperative Relationships:** Seek cooperative and cost-effective relationships with other units of government in the delivery of recreation facilities and programs. Those units include Eau Claire and Chippewa Counties, the Eau Claire Area School District, the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, City of Altoona, adjoining towns, and private sports associations and user groups. The aim will be to avoid duplication and counterproductive competition, while communicating and planning cooperatively.
- 2. Planned Lower Chippewa River Park:** Support the acquisition and development of a new community park along the lower Chippewa River (south of I-94) by Eau Claire County. This site is in the Town of Brunswick and could serve regional recreation needs such as boating, fishing, hiking, picnicking, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, and nature study. It would also provide flood storage. It would be linked to the Chippewa River State Trail and other bicycling routes in Eau Claire via the riverfront trail along the American Materials site north of I-94.

Extensive reforestation would be required for this long-term project, as the site has been recently mined for gravel and inundated over the centuries by floods. Assistance from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) should be sought for that work.

- 3. Otter Creek Greenway:** Pursue the acquisition and joint management of a greenway and trail along Otter Creek. The land needed for the greenway and trail is currently located in the Cities of Altoona and Eau Claire and the Town of Washington. The City of Eau Claire should initiate efforts to work cooperatively with adjacent jurisdictions to acquire and develop the greenway.
- 4. Chippewa River State Trail:** Coordinate with the DNR and adjacent municipalities to maintain and promote the Chippewa River State Trail. This trail is the most prominent example of a recreation facility in or near Eau Claire that is managed by several jurisdictions. With the completion of the trailhead building in Phoenix Park (at the confluence of the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers) the trail through Eau Claire will be substantially complete.
- 5. Private Indoor Recreation Facilities:** Include consideration of the three major indoor recreation facilities in Eau Claire: the Downtown YMCA, the Y's tennis facility and skate park, and the Eau Claire Indoor Sports Center adjacent to the soccer park, when determining the need for new or expanded City facilities. When

seeking to address the overall community need for indoor recreation facilities, the City should continue to emphasize the importance of ensuring accessible facilities that are affordable to all members of the community.

- 6. School Facilities:** Seek to co-locate City parks with schools and to use existing school gymnasiums or pools to meet City recreational program needs.